

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 8, 2009

The Honorable Carlos Gutierrez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing in light of the National Telecommunications Information Administration's (NTIA) announcement earlier this week that consumers requesting coupons from the agency's TV Converter Box Coupon Program will now be placed on a waiting list due to a shortage of funds. I urge NTIA to act immediately to ensure that the DTV converter box coupon program can meet the needs of millions of Americans who rely on over-the-air TV.

In Wisconsin alone, nearly one-quarter of the population – over half a million households – rely on free over-the-air TV. In order to promote a successful conversion to digital television, my office, broadcasters and many other volunteers throughout Wisconsin are working to assist consumers in obtaining coupons and purchasing converter boxes. Coupon demand has been rising significantly with no signs of slowing. Thus far, Wisconsin households have requested 1,483,882 converter box coupons and 723,193 coupons have been redeemed. I am particularly concerned that a slowdown in the provision of coupons will affect viewers most at-risk of losing reception, including the elderly, disabled and those living in rural areas.

In addition, according to NTIA estimates, it is possible that retail stores will not be able to meet the demand for converter boxes, and could fall short by millions. Certainly any extension to the coupon program must be met with an adequate supply of converter boxes. I urge NTIA to make certain that retailers will also be able to meet the increased demand for converter boxes.

There is very little time remaining before the February 17 transition, therefore I urge you to act without delay to bolster funding for the coupon program and to work make certain that inventory is available when coupons are once again distributed. It is our duty to ensure that all consumers have a successful and seamless conversion to digital television.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Herb Kohl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Herb" and last name "Kohl" clearly distinguishable.

Herb Kohl
U.S. Senator